

A Critical Reflection on the Relevance of Philosophy in the Contemporary World

Godwin Azenabor, Ph.D

Professor of Philosophy

University of Lagos

Abstract

It was Karl Marx, who once said that philosophers have only succeeded in interpreting the world in various ways; what is left is for them is to change it. It is precisely this type of perception that is serving as a catalyst to this paper. The man who has never sought the truth or one who thinks that he or she already possesses it never feels upset or disturbed. If the former is deficient in ambition, the latter is lacking in foresight. The essence of philosophy is metaphysical - the metaphysical urge to penetrate reality not the task of changing the world! This paper is an exercise in philosophical inquiry and reflections on the contemporaneous and typical question of relevance of philosophy to society and development in the contemporary world. We show the importance of philosophy to other disciplines and bring out its importance as an intellectual enterprise and show its mutual cross fertilization of ideas as the search for truth, knowledge, reality and value, which are the driving forces behind intellectual inquiry.

Introduction

When beginning a course of study, it is in order for us to seek some form of definitions of the subject – matter or at least its boundary and an overview of its contents, nature and importance. The purpose of this is to enable us understand the nature of the thing in question. Understanding the concept or nature of anything is a formidable task, especially in academic circle. This is because academicians, more than any other group of people, are intellectually cantankerous and ideologically unyielding. Another reason why it is necessary for us to define our subject matter is because we want to situate our discourse, “delineate its scope and perhaps teleguide the reader” (Momoh, 1996.312). Furthermore, conceptualising or defining our

term, would sort out related matters that might obscure the reader, if they are not properly explained and contextualised.

Scarcely is there any academic subject which has so many misapprehensions as philosophy. In fact the most provocative and perhaps embarrassing question a philosopher can be asked is, “what is philosophy?” This is because the nature of philosophy is not well understood. Philosophers are divided into numerous hostile camps on this issue. The reason for this is because of the different area perspectives of philosophy. Most definitions of philosophy are perspectival. There are five basic subject areas in philosophy, namely, Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics, Logic and the Philosophy of other Disciplines or what some scholars have called the Philosophy of Infrastructure of Disciplines. Each philosopher tends to define philosophy from the bias of one or more of these area perspectives. Another reason for the lack of a universally acceptable definition of philosophy has been identified as the difference in schools of thought, that is, is the philosopher an idealist or a materialist? The school of thought tends to affect the philosopher’s perception of philosophy. There is also the question of culture. A philosopher is said to be a child of his culture and culture often influences a philosopher’s definition and perception of a subject-matter. The age or epoch is another area perceptible that also influences a philosopher’s definition. Finally, there is the ambition based on a programme and agenda. A philosopher has a programme and an agenda or ambition (Momoh, 1996, 312-315). A philosopher is either a philosopher of the status-quo or a philosopher of change.

A cursory look at the history of philosophy shows that philosophy has a chequered history and that philosophy is an analytical term. Today, however, “philosophy goes with criticism, scepticism and refusal to believe unless on rational grounds” (Wiredu, 1980, 3). Philosophy goes with arguments, reflections, rationality and critical evaluation. In fact, argument is a decisive characteristic of philosophy “Without intuitive argument and clarification, there is strictly no philosophy” (Wiredu, 1980). This is because philosophy, strictly speaking, is an exercise in elaborate argumentation, clarification and answering of objections, known or anticipated.

Furthermore, philosophy begins with wonder. This sense of wonder is so vital to the philosopher (White, 1981, 74).

A philosopher is a professional thinker, equipped with the intuitive insight and rational stamina to delve, more than superficially, into the difficult and complex problems of life and living. "Take nothing for granted" is the dictum of the philosopher. Philosophy also goes with critical reflection, the asking of fundamental questions and scepticism. This definition of philosophy is from the point of view of method. There is also the definition from the point of view of content. Here, cognizance is taken that philosophy is traditionally divided into four core areas, viz. Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics and Logic-where Logic is both an instrument or tool and a branch of philosophy. In this respect, we define philosophy as a critical, rational and systematic reflection or study of the nature of the world, of man and his position and goal in the world. Philosophy is the study of the fundamental questions and principles underlying conduct, thought and knowledge (Azenabor, 2001: 14).

Philosophy can be seen as both an academic discipline and as an intellectual enterprise. The former is specialised and requires formal training and is explicit, while the latter is an endowment and is implicit in our actions. Here philosophy is everybody's business. This is why we cannot escape from philosophy. "Every adult conducts his life according to some general pattern of behaviour that is more or less conscious, more or less consistent, more or less adequate, to cope with the everyday affairs and inevitable crisis of human scene. This guiding pattern in the life of every person is his philosophy, even though it is implicit in his actions rather than explicit in his mind..." (Lamont, 1965: 3 & 4).

Philosophy is an inquiry into the ultimate nature of truth, reality and value. In fact philosophy has been defined as the knowledge of ultimate principles (Stace, 1937: 307). It is also the critical analysis of concepts. It is essentially the articulation and clarification of concepts. It is the consciousness of a people at a point in time. The social milieu in which a philosopher lives influences and encourages him or her in the explanation and understanding of the nature of

things. Philosophy by its nature responds to society and social problems.

It is a subject where the exercise of human reason is at its highest level. So philosophy is a critical and rational enterprise. Being a rational enterprise, philosophy seeks to eradicate from our perspective every taints and vestige of ignorance, superstition, prejudice, blind acceptance of ideas, and any form of irrationality. It challenges our idea, analyses them, and test them in the light of evidences and arguments. It attempts to coherently and validly express our ideas (Patterson, P. 80).

There are some people who think that philosophy is such an irrelevant discipline with little or no relevance to human life or society. It was Karl Marx, who once said that philosophers have only succeeded in interpreting the world in various ways, what is left is for them to change it. It is precisely this type of perception that is serving as a catalyst for this paper. The paper is an exercise in philosophical inquiry and reflections on the contemporaneous and topical question of the relevance of philosophy to society and development in the contemporary world. Philosophy has been accused by the average intelligent person of being exceedingly abstract, irrelevant and a disinterested study. This view is misleading; it expresses an utter ignorance of what philosophy is all about. Our task in this article is to show the relevance of philosophy, importance of philosophy to other disciplines and bring out the importance of philosophy as an intellectual enterprise and show its mutual cross fertilization of ideas.

The Relevance/Importance of Philosophy

The question of the value of philosophy is often asked – what can philosophy do for us or give us? It is the opinion of some people that philosophy is suffering from the crisis of relevance. Hence, the question “what can you do with philosophy?” philosophy stands accused by the average person of being “irrelevant”, “abstract”, and “a disinterested study”. Philosophy, especially in Africa, is often thought to be an optional enterprise, a serving unit, a discipline that is socially disabled. Now, what then is the reward of doing philosophy? This question is a pressing one because philosophy for

instance, does not teach us how to make money, increase our social status, get rich quick or with ease and give us a better bargaining power in the labour market. But “more than wealth and prestige, philosophy... provides for man an opportunity to fulfil his life’s purpose which is a more basic need” (Okolo, 1985: 146). But philosophy has a very important role to play in the society. You can do just about anything with philosophy. Philosophy is very relevant to human condition, life and existence.

Firstly, Philosophy is interesting, intellectually stimulating and challenging. It provides us with numerous skills, especially cognitive skills like logical and structural arguments, evaluative and analytical abilities, clear and innovative thinking, the asking of fundamental questions etc. These skills are transferable to any endeavour the philosopher finds him or herself.

Secondly, Philosophy helps determine societal values, development and progress. Before philosophy, human beings explained the world by reference to the gods. Philosophy stopped and destroyed the idea of using the gods as explanatory devices for accounting for phenomena. So the emergence of philosophy was an intellectual revolution.

In fact, the importance of philosophy can be discussed as follows:

1. The Love and pursuit of Wisdom

The term “philosophy” literally means “the love for wisdom”. The first person to coin the word and call himself a philosopher was a Greek called Pythagoras (570-495 BC). He said he was a lover of wisdom. Love for him was not *possession* but *focus* and *pursuit*. Wisdom for him informs our beliefs, values and decisions. Whereas, Pythagoras coined the word “philosophy”, it was Socrates that popularized it. The point is that, the role of philosophy is important from its Etymological meaning as the love for wisdom. “Without wisdom for instance, social justice would not be possible” (White, 1981:78). Wisdom is an affair of value and judgment; it involves the intelligent conduct of human affairs and interpretation of experience. So, there is the importance of philosophy in its etymological meaning as the

“love for wisdom”. Every discipline really needs this wisdom in its enterprise. And this wisdom is essential in a nation’s progress and civilization than anything else. Without wisdom for instance, social justice would not be possible. “Wisdom is an affair of value and of value judgments. It is the intelligent conduct of human affairs. It is knowledge of what is most worthy in our experience, of the ends which we can justifiably pursue, of the good, the better and the best, the bad, the worse and the worst in those concrete situations in which confronted by alternatives of policies of action, we ask what shall I do? (Okolo, 1985, 150). Philosophy “sharpens the wits, exercises the reasoning powers, destroys prejudices and develops the habit of considering all questions with an open mind” (Stace, 1937: 10).

2. Self-Understanding:

According to Kierkegaard, what philosophy can give is self-understanding. “Self-understanding involves knowing who I really am apart from the masks I present to others, the social roles I fulfill, or the label and descriptions imposed on me by my society and my peers. It also involves understanding my beliefs and values and being aware of why I act the way I do, including knowing whether my actions result from my own authentic choices or from taken-for-granted, unexamined assumptions or the influences of my culture (Lawhead, 2003: 3). Self-understanding is something that is most difficult; most people try to avoid it, because it is easier to be complacent, self-satisfied, and stick with beliefs that are comfortable and familiar than to painfully and honestly subject them to examination. *While other disciplines provide answers to problems, philosophy’s contribution to society is to provide the problems to everyone’s answers.* The philosopher is not he who gives the answer but he who poses the question and problem. This brings us to the third role of philosophy in the society.

3. The Asking of Fundamental Questions:

Philosophy deals with questions – basic and fundamental questions. Philosophy is the asking of basic questions about the meaning of our basic concepts, beliefs, practices, decisions,

ideas and values. Philosophy tries to rationally justify these. So, philosophy is also rational justification.

4. **The Subject Matter of Philosophy:**

The importance of philosophy is in its subject-matter – what philosophers study. Now what is philosophy all about? For example, we know that medical doctors study medicine, lawyers study law, astronomers study stars, psychologists study human and animal behaviour, etc. What part of the universe or human experience do philosophers study? It seems that “philosopher’s centre is everywhere and its circumference nowhere” (ibid. P 6). The uniqueness of philosophy is “not because it thinks about different things, but because it thinks about things differently” (ibid). The subject-matter or content of philosophy are:

- **Logic:** Philosophy is about how we ought to think, if we are to be rational. Logic is the study of the principle for distinguishing correct from incorrect reasoning. It deals with arguments, fallacies, evidences, and validity of thought.
- **Epistemology:** this is the theory of knowledge. It is the study or search of the nature, source, scope and validity of knowledge, the concept of truth, the objectivity or relativity of our beliefs. Can it be said that there can be no truth to anything but fact?
- **Metaphysics:** this is the search for the ultimate nature of reality. It deals with disturbing questions of human existence, like, what is man? What is the relationship between mind and body? Is man free or determined? Does God exist? Who is God? Etc. The metaphysical essence of philosophy is that philosophy redirects the thinking and values of man by asking and tackling fundamental metaphysical questions relating to the meaning of life and existence and life’s basic purpose. What is the purpose of life and living? Why am I here? Who am I? It is the way individuals conceive the answers to these challenging questions of existence that makes for their type of living, contentment and valuation. To tackle these issues and

questions, many turn to religion, some to science. Most forget philosophy; metaphysics, is the rational method of tackling these questions about human existence, the universe and man's place and role in it. The essence of philosophy is metaphysical. Philosophy creates the metaphysical urge to penetrate reality. There is always a deep need for metaphysical knowledge, because man is a curious animal, he wants to know and he clamours for fresh insight. The knowledge of metaphysics, which is the science of first principles, gives us certain basic principles with which to understand the nature of things. It is in this respect that philosophy has been said to be ontology.

- **Ethics:** this is the study of the nature and problems of moral values, the criteria for moral judgment, how to decide right or wrong action or behaviour.

So, philosophy is the search for truth, knowledge, reality and value. The man who has never sought the truth or one who thinks that he or she already possesses it never feels upset or disturbed. If the former is deficient in ambition, the latter is lacking in foresight. The powerful urge for knowledge, truth and reality has been the driving force behind intellectual inquiry. This is the goal of philosophy. It shows how truth can become operative in the affairs of men, and also helps create an intellectual environment in which truth is respected. Philosophy as the ultimate discipline gives the necessary depth, scale of value, provides meaningful and practicable answers to the nature of truth, knowledge and reality in social, political, religious, moral and economic spheres. Philosophy makes man deep and perceptive. "Individuals often lose true perception of reality, substituting the non-essentials for essentials; fleeting pleasures for more permanent, self-fulfilling ones, falsehood for truth, etc" (Okolo, 1989: 70).

- **The Philosophy of Other Disciplines:** philosophy serves as the intellectual foundation of all disciplines. Philosophy raises questions about specific disciplines, which forms additional scope of philosophy. These

include philosophy of religion, political philosophy, philosophy of arts and culture, philosophy of education, philosophy of history, philosophy of language, philosophy of law, philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of psychology, philosophy of science, philosophy of social science etc. The practical value of philosophy comes out better with respect to other disciplines. Philosophy is the parent discipline and the intellectual foundation of all disciplines. Philosophy has a place in the general scheme of human knowledge. It relates to other branches of knowledge. Philosophy, according to Herbert Spencer, coordinates the other branches of knowledge (Stace, 1937: 303). “Human knowledge is like a tree, with a trunk and many branches. The trunk, the parent stem is, or was, philosophy. The branches are the special sciences. All knowledge was originally included in philosophy. But as knowledge has grown, it has differentiated itself” (Ibid). The knowledge that has not yet been taken over by any discipline or sciences is what philosophy concerns itself with. Philosophy serves as the intellectual foundation of all disciplines. Philosophy is the beginning and the ending of all intellectual enterprise. So there is really no discourse outside the province of philosophy. Every discipline has its own philosophical foundation, which gives it force and a sense of direction (Azenabor, 1998: 144). In fact, “the philosophic enterprise covers in its own particular way, practically the whole gamut of human thought and activity” (Lamont, 1965:6). Philosophy was the parent stem out of which grew all branches of knowledge; hence philosophy is an integral part of any complete knowledge and education.

The Mutual Cross – Fertilization of Philosophy

Given the nature of philosophy, with its tool of critical analysis, evaluation, the asking of fundamental questions, argument, rationality, logic, its contact with any discipline will give it necessary depth, better scale of value and the necessary rational stamina needed to delve more than superficially into issues of life and living, providing meaningful and practicable answers to moral, educational, social,

political, religious and economic problems. The philosophical spirit when applied to other disciplines helps to improve the reflective abilities and critical powers of the disciplines.

We have what is today referred to as the philosophy of other disciplines or the philosophy of the infrastructure of disciplines. In the Philosophy of other Disciplines, the philosopher inquires into other substantive area of intellectual enterprise or independent disciplines. Here, the relationship between philosophy and other disciplines surfaces. The philosophy of other disciplines is therefore simply the study of the principles behind the fundamental questions and claims raised or made in other disciplines and the examination of their validity.

The Philosophy of other Disciplines is a second order activity which deals with the general theories, character, problems and pre-suppositions in other disciplines. It is the application of philosophical methods to other disciplines. In this respect, the philosopher has been accused of being an imperialist, a busy-body, who is meddling with other people's disciplines. The philosopher is accused of pretending to know what he does not or ought not to know. But the reason for this "imperialist" character of philosophy, it must be noted, is that philosophy, if we may recall, is the mother of all disciplines: the other disciplines are intellectual descendants of philosophy. This is precisely the reason why at the apex of any intellectual or academic enterprise, a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) is awarded as a sign of continuity and paternalism, so philosophy began and ends all intellectual enterprise. In this respect, philosophy has been described as the highest intellectual achievement of mankind. It is along this line that Momoh sums up: "Philosophy is the base and the apex, the foundation, the ceiling and the roof of any civilization, any religion, any science, indeed any discipline. Any culture, any way of life; corporate or individual, is anchored on a philosophy, floats on a philosophy and hangs on a philosophy. Philosophy is the ultimate intellectual discipline; it is the queen and the king of all the disciplines. Wherever philosophy is present, there is light, where it is absent there is darkness" (Momoh, 1996, 309).

Given the profound nature of philosophy, its contact with any discipline will give the necessary depth, better scale of values and the rational stamina needed to delve into the issues of life and living, provide meaningful and practicable answers to educational, social, political, religious, moral and economic problems. The philosophical spirit, when applied to other disciplines helps to improve the reflective abilities and critical powers of the disciplines. The relationship between philosophy and other disciplines are as outlined below:

Philosophy and Education

The contact between philosophy and education dovetails to the intellectual enterprise called Philosophy of Education. Philosophy of Education deals with the general theories, character, fundamental questions, problems and pre-suppositions in the discipline of education. When educators apply philosophical principles or methods to the field of education or when philosophers turn their attention to education, we have philosophy of education. G. F. Kneller confirms the role of philosophy in Education when he writes: “Philosophy questions some pre-suppositions in educational practice with a view to giving meaning, and synthesis to this same process. Philosophy seeks to comprehend education in its entirety, interpreting it by means of general concepts that will guide the choice of educational ends and policies” (Kneller, 1963, 64).

It is not always easy for the educator to combine contents, instructions, techniques, students and their behaviours with educational goal. It is the philosophy of Education that takes care of the educational goal – the curriculum of education is influenced by values, like the divine, the material, etc. What does the educational system take as its value? It is philosophy that determines the scale of values.

Philosophy of education gives new insight into contemporary problems and issues in educational matter and helps the educator to take a wider educational perspective at educational problems and attempts to answer basic questions, like, why do we go to school? Who should be educated? What is education? What criteria should guide decisions on the contents of education? What should the teacher teach and why? What should he condemn or commend?

What is the right method to use in imparting or disseminating knowledge?

Philosophy and History

Philosophy is related to History through the Philosophy of History. Here one of the questions asked by philosophers is what History is or what is the meaning of History? This question is of a fundamental importance to the historian even though the question, strictly speaking, is not a Historical question. The question deals with the essence and nature of History. It is a philosophical question. For this question to be adequately tackled by the historian he must have recourse to philosophy.

Another problem facing the philosopher of history is the question of historical methodology. The kind of methodology a historian uses really defines his idea of history. For example, “a Hegelian historian who believes that there is a necessary universal force or law that drives history towards its goal-freedom – and that history is a development in the consciousness of freedom, will use a different methodology in his study of history from someone like Karl R. Popper who believes in “the poverty of Historicism”, that is there are no objective laws, metaphysical or scientific, on the basis of which historical developments are predictable” (Jackson, 1997, 36). The questions in historical methodology are; is history a science? Are there objective laws guiding historical process? What is the logic or rationality behind historiography (i.e. record of history)? etc. These are philosophical questions in the philosophy of history. They are the most critical aspects of history, which is different from the study of history as a chronicle of facts. The critical aspect of history which is philosophical reflects upon the method by which such facts are obtained.

Philosophy and Law

Most lawyers are concerned with what the law says and the actions that are legal or illegal. The lawyers know legal and illegal actions and what sanctions or penalties are stipulated for illegal actions. This is ‘positive law’. This positive aspect of law does not concern itself with whether or not a legal rule is morally justified. Rather what the

lawyer is concerned about is the *validity* not the *moral justification* of law.

It is philosophy of law that passes from the question of law to philosophy, from the question of validity of law or what the law says to what is the nature of law itself, upon what concept is law based? What are the ethical justifications for the concept of obligation? Ought I always obey the law? How much or to what extent does morality influence the law? What are the justifications for law? What is the relationship between moral and legal responsibility? What is the purpose of punishment and what are the moral and logical justifications for it? It is these and other related questions that are raised in the philosophy of law, otherwise known as legal philosophy or Jurisprudential philosophy. For anybody to deal with the above questions competently, the person will have to be a philosopher – a legal philosopher or a specialist in jurisprudential philosophy. “The task of philosophy of Law is to discuss the nature and sources of law, and the relation of law to ethics or morality”, (Jackson, 1997, 37). So the philosopher of Law probes deeper than the lawyer. The philosopher of Law tries to understand and get the justification for the very concept on which the law is based.

A critic may object by saying that philosophy of law is not as important as we are portraying it – that law is sufficient in itself for all we need –which is the social control of human beings or the maintenance of security, law and order in the society. But to argue this way is to refuse to see beyond the wider horizon of law. Every legal system is based explicitly or implicitly on some form of principles. Philosophy, as we said earlier, is the study of the principles underlying knowledge and reality.

Philosophy and Religion

In the study of Religion, there are many fundamental questions that a theologian, except he is a philosopher, cannot deal with successfully. Theology as the study of Religion “deals with the sociological, historical and perhaps, the psychological aspects of religion or religious questions,” (Jackson, 1997, 39). It is philosophy of religion that makes the theologian deep and wiser.

Philosophy of Religion deals with such questions as, what is religion or who is a religious man? What is the nature of God? What are the arguments for and against the existence of God? Can we hold the idea of God side by side with the problem of evil without contradiction? What is the nature of miracles and religious experience or knowledge? etc. These are fundamental questions that cannot be answered satisfactorily without going outside religion, the Bible or Quoran, to philosophy –the appeal to human reason, rather than revelation. It is in philosophy that the exercise of human reason is at its highest peak. This is precisely why religion has a need for philosophy, if it has to make sense of its beliefs, claims and theories. Our crucial role as philosophers of Religion, therefore, is to examine the knowledge claims that are made in the area of religion, to see if they can be justified and to evaluate and interpret the claims within the framework of rational understanding.

Philosophy and Science

Philosophy is also related to Science through Philosophy of Science. Philosophy of Science is primarily concerned with how science works, how the reasoning in science can be justified. It examines scientific statements, theories, claims, assumptions, methodology and developments. Philosophy of Science deals with questions like: what is the nature of scientific investigation? Is science objective?, etc.

Philosophy of Science also has social and moral aspects. Here, we study critically ethical issues of scientific use or misuse. Philosophy of Science in its moral sphere studies ecological safety and bio-hazards from chemical, industrial and radio-active releases from nuclear power activities.

Science and philosophy are both pre-occupied with reality, truth and knowledge. In this respect, the two disciplines supplement each other. But while philosophy deals with the “why?” science deals with the “how?” Science, however, does not stop in the “how?” It also deals with the “application” of knowledge and this is where technology comes in. To discover truth is the task of science, to define the nature of this truth is the task of philosophy. Science grows on ideas and philosophy provides the ideas. Philosophy has no

doubt influenced scientific developments through its checks and critical analysis of scientific assumptions and knowledge. But both science and philosophy aim at liberating man from ignorance.

Philosophy of Arts and Literature

Philosophy is related to Arts, like Design, Fine Arts, Creative Arts, Music and Literature. Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that deals with these subjects. “Aesthetics is a philosophy or perception of beauty in art and in nature” (Jackson, 1997, 42). Here, the fundamental questions are: What is Art? Of what use is artistic production? What is artistic experience? What is beauty, love and ugliness? etc.

Philosophy and Language

Philosophy of language deals with the theories and problems of meaning and the nature of Language. A branch of philosophy in which the concern for Language is very prominent is logic. Logic is the study of correct and incorrect reasoning, valid and invalid inferences. And our reasoning and thoughts are carried out in Language. An important part of Logic consists in the classification of statements and meanings. Language deals with statements and meanings.

The philosophical concern for language has to do with the concept of philosophy as conceptual clarifications and analyses. Hence, we have analytic movement in philosophy, which is mainly concerned with language. Here, it is the “philosopher’s business to bring out features of the use or meaning of various words and forms of statements, it is essential for him to proceed on the basis of some general conception of the nature of linguistic use and meaning” (Alston, 1994,7).

Philosophy and Politics

The area of contact between philosophy and politics or political science is in political philosophy. The political scientist deals with the *descriptive and prescriptive* meaning of political terms like “democracy”, “equality”, “freedom”, “government”, etc, but not the *normative* meaning. To discuss the normative meaning of political terms is to pass from politics to ethics, a branch of philosophy. So, the political scientist appeals to philosophy and he does this through the study of political philosophy.

Political philosophy is fundamental or primary to the whole of political science. This is because the political scientist tries to get a philosophical base or justification for the political values which he studies. Philosophy and political science touch in the area of political theories and the nature of man as a political and rational animal.

Philosophy and Mathematics

Philosophy and Mathematics also relate through logic – symbolic logic. Some logicians even claim that Arithmetic is derivable from logic. “And since Algebra and Geometry are extensions of Arithmetic, it follows that the whole of pure mathematics is based on logic and is reducible to logic. The study of logic is therefore of a great fundamental importance to the students of mathematics” (Jackson, 1997, 41).

The basic assumptions and axioms of mathematics are *a-priori* propositions in philosophy. The why of the question $1 + 1 = 2$ cannot be successfully explained without recourse to a metaphysical and basic assumption. The question, “what is 1?”, is axiomatic and improvable. It is a first principle, which is metaphysical. And metaphysics is the heart-beat of philosophy.

Philosophy and Psychology

Philosophy of Psychology or philosophical psychology examines the theories, claims and pre-suppositions of Psychology. Psychology is the study of individual and inter-personal behaviour (human and animal) for the purpose of understanding. The philosophical questions in psychology are, Is Psychology a science? What is science? What is the nature of the human mind, intellect, will, action, emotion and the mental processes? Is man free or determined, egoistic or altruistic? What is the driving motive of human actions? Can we study scientifically human behaviour, predict and control human actions? Etc.

Philosophical psychology has implication for philosophy of mind. It is in the philosophy of mind that philosophy and psychology relate. Philosophy of mind concerns itself with the theories about the nature of the human mind. Here, the philosopher postulates theories that are made the basis of arguments and debates in this respect. The

psychologist tries to explain human mind and behaviour through quantitative and empirical analysis and experimentation, while the philosopher examines the validity of the claims.

Finally, the philosopher is interested in psychology because most of the claims of the psychologist, like other social scientists are value laden.

From the above explication, it is evident that there is really no discourse or discipline outside the province of philosophy. Every discipline has its own philosophical foundation, which gives it a force and a sense of direction. This is the philosophical principle. This is precisely why we can define philosophy as the principle underlying reality, conduct, thought and knowledge. Knowledge of philosophy is fundamental to the understanding of any discipline.

Philosophy and Society

Philosophy has an immense role to play in the society. The concern of the philosophers for values, goals, ends of human society, human activity and the means of achieving these, makes the philosopher better qualified to play the role of helping to determine societal values, development and progress. Where the knowledge of philosophy is supplied to our societal life it creates more enlightenment and gives more meaning, thereby enlarging our range of vision and perspective. Philosophy is a response to society and to social problems (Azenabor, 1998:144 – 145). Philosophy influences the formulation of policies. So philosophy is not just an abstraction, it grapples with substantive problems of life and living in the society.

Philosophers can make policy makers to appreciate the deeper aspect of the problems of development – constantly reminding them, for instance of the true nature and dignity of society's greatest asset, namely, man himself, (White, 1981: 21). Philosophy is an important tool of national development, where development is not seen as one-dimensional that is technological development only. There is also cultural, intellectual and even moral development. This is where philosophy has an important role to play in development. "Culture as a way of life of a people needs 'a standard of appeal', it needs a basic principle and ethic that justifies and defends it. This ethic should be

rational and open to significant changes. But it cannot be so unless it is a philosophical postulate and guided by a constant philosophical inquiry” (Jackson, 1997, 44-45).

In most African societies, there is need for cultural authenticity and development. This is where philosophy became useful to society, in the sense that it contributes greatly to the foundation of the standard of the culture of a society.

Philosophy as a Repository of Ideas

Another point to note is that philosophy is important in the area of ideas. Every organization; be it medical, social, political, economic, education, financial, industrial, media, or even religious need ideas and philosophy is the repository of ideas. The real essence of philosophy however, is metaphysical – the metaphysical urge to penetrate reality. Metaphysical questions like what is man? What is the place of man in the universe? What is the origin of things? Why is there something instead of nothing? Is nothing even something? Why am I here and where do I go from here? What is the meaning of life? These are ontological wonder which are beyond bread and butter.

Relevance of Philosophy to Africa

Philosophy, in spite of its universal nature is culturally rooted. Philosophy is in fact a consciousness of a people at a point in time; it is always natured within a cultural experience, tradition and history. African philosophy is a cultural and regional philosophy that must be made relevant to African societies. A philosophy in Africa should not be abstract but must be seen in the context of social and human relevance. It must be at the service of man. It must grapple with the African problems and experience.

To make philosophy relevant to Africa we are enjoined to go beyond the elucidation of African ideas and delve into the critical examination, clarification and exposition of the changes these ideas have undergone and the conditions that made these changes possible (Momoh, 1991; 18). We must avoid any attempt to describe and defend the Africa cultures and traditions without taking into consideration the changes that have taken place in our environment, both physical and social.

The question of relevance revisits and popularizes Marxist orientation in African philosophy initiated by Wiredu and expounded by Olusegun Oladipo, C. A. Diop, S. B. Oluwole and W. Abraham. These philosophers would want philosophy in Africa to concentrate on African existential experience and problems. The question which they ask is how an idea in philosophy has been able to interpret the African world and how it has changed it. If we may recall, Marx's idea of philosophy has to do with changing the world, rather than merely explaining it.

In relating philosophy to Africa, we must take cognizance of Wiredu's advice that we avoid:

- i. Anachronism
- ii. Authoritarianism
- iii. Supernaturalism (Wiredu, 1980: 131)

Again, we must think of a reconstruction, taking into cognizance:

- a. The influence of science and its consequences in modern life;
- b. The structure and exigencies of urban life as against the traditional family life, which has now been dislocated;
- c. The movement of education from the informal and unquestioning truth to the formal and institutionalised status; and
- d. That philosophy has become more and more a matter of individual responsibility than it was collective in the traditional time.

The Relevance of African philosophy

By African philosophy, I simply mean the philosophy that is nourished and rooted within an African cultural experience, tradition and history. African philosophy has been and will continue to be relevant to the existential experience of Africans. In African societies there has been and there will continue to be the need for cultural authenticity and development. This is where African philosophy will be useful. With African philosophy, we are able to evolve a cultural philosophy, an indigenous educational philosophy, African socio-political philosophy, African ethics, epistemology, metaphysics and even African medicine.

In the area of ethics, for example, we can in the context of Africa, evolve a value system that we can truly call our own; a value system that will produce meaningful and practical solution to our moral problems. This we can do by building from our root and culture, taking into consideration our conditions, historical background and reality. We should stop copying values that do not fit properly into our system. There is need for authentic existence. We do not want to be “African Europeans”. Hence, we do not need to “fry” our hair or bleach our skins in order to look European. Everything has an adaptation to life.

In the political sphere, a dose of African philosophy is necessary to enable us appreciate our political heritage. Basically, political life in traditional African society centres around the chief, Obas, and Emirs, whose authority are religious, administrative and judicial. The African traditional culture is an organic whole. In other words, it is impossible to separate religion from politics, politics from economy, and economy from moral values. The concentration of powers notwithstanding, the Oba, Chief or Emir is not a despot. There are traditional restrictions to his powers. Subjects could demand for his removal, if he failed them, and a king could even commit suicide for failure. There is also the fear of ancestral vengeance and sanctions from constitutional deities. Furthermore, “the ability of families to move or migrate from an abusive and despotic Chief, Oba or Emir and join Chieftom restricted the Chief’s power, for he could lose manpower and tribute. So the Oba or Emir embraces his office with a mixed feeling of joy and fear; joy for having been elevated to an office that will confer on him, if he performs his duty successfully the title of ancestor and fear of weakening the bond between God, spirit, man and the whole universe, should he grossly abuse his office or be found unworthy” (Anyanwu and Ruch, 1981; 373).

The relevance of this, therefore, in contemporary African set-up, is that in order for us to have a truly indigenous and nationalistic political order, we should restructure the country (Nigeria) into its different political units. In order to achieve this effectively in modern time, a confederation would be an ideal form of government for Nigeria. This is a situation where the government of the whole is

subordinate to the government of the parts. But a common organisation could be set-up to regulate matters of common concern

Another aspect of the relevance of African philosophy in the political sphere is ideological. This is the idea or principle that Africans should develop their own personality, hence ideologies like Pan Africanism and Negritude.

Pan-Africanism is a response to Western disparaging comments and discourse an African thought. Pan-Africanism is an attempt to define, characterize and establish African cultural identity. It was a political movement launched in London in 1893, initiated by Henry Sylvester Williams and later W. E. B. Dubois, an African-American activist, scholar and champion of the interest of Africans. The movement manifested in a series of conferences and congress in Paris, London, Lisbon, New York, Manchester and Tanzania in the 1990s. Pan Africanism is meant to help towards characterizing a uniquely African personality and identity.

Thereafter came Negritude, which though is often associated with Leopold Senghor, the first president of Senegal, the first person who actually coined the term “Negritude” was Aimie Cesairie of Martinique in his poem “Return to my Native Land” in 1937. However, it was Senghor who later popularised, politicised and ideologised the concept (See A. G. Mosley, 1995: 222). Negritude attempted to re-construct the distinctive characteristics of African personality complimented by an African mode of knowing. Senghor places greater emphasis on traditional African cultural values. Negritude constitutes an authentic African identity, a distinctive mode of being and existence. These ideologies help Africans to fight colonialism, oppression and neo-colonialism.

The African wants to become *modern* but not *westernized*. It is against this background that we understand Momoh’s recommendation of an active oath taking as an authentic path for Africanism. Momoh recommends that “every public office holder should be made to swear on juju, specifically prepared for that purpose, spelling out what should befall the oath taker if he wilfully and deliberately enriches himself, friends or relation. It is irrelevant whether the swearer

believes in juju or not.... the efficacy of juju is not a matter of belief, it is real” (Momoh. 1991: 132). This active oath taking is based on the beliefs, culture and values of the traditional African. This recommendation becomes relevant in this modern day Nigeria, where heads of state or government, and their agents are treasury looters, where most Nigerians in public offices no longer have conscience, where there is large scale corruption, abuse of office and mismanagement.

African philosophy is relevant even in the medical realm – no one today doubts the efficacy of African traditional medicine or alternative medicine. There is also African science which is moral and mystical in its causal explanation. The moral or ethical has to do with man’s conduct and is a derivative of the principle of retribution. There is an essential connection between past and present actions. The mystical is related to the actions of the gods, ancestors, fellow human beings etc. Here reality is beyond space and time, causal explanation is beyond the physical and mechanical – knowledge is not just empirical there is mystical and spiritual knowledge. In fact, modern science has come to terms with African science, especially in the context of the present state of scientific research with the relativity and Quantum theories and post-modern developments in science. “We are now living at a time when science at its highest power has entered the spiritual world” (Anyanwu, 1983: 16) Today, in science, non-physical dimensions, like spiritual entities, proton and electron are now accommodated. Atom is no longer the simplest indivisible particle of an element.

There is also the technological dimension to African Science – i.e. the application of science is technology. For example, we can put water in the calabash having performed necessary incantations we call the name of whoever and whatever we want to deal with and it appears and we detect a culprit or thief – technologically! There is also “Aferi” – where you place your back or one foot on the wall and disappear. There is also the causing of rainfall and stoppage of rainfall for human benefit, that is, the power to manipulate or co-exist with nature. We also have action-at-a-distance; without physical contact, “Utagba” in Esan culture. All these can be harnessed to make African philosophy and culture relevant in the modern world.

The Challenge to Philosophy

From the above exposition, the question “what can philosophy do for us?” has been obliterated. So philosophy can no more be said to be suffering from the crisis of relevance. But even then philosophy still stands accused. Philosophy is accused by the average intelligent person of being exceedingly abstract. Philosophy for instance, does not teach one how to make money, increase one’s social status, and get rich quick or with ease and give one a better bargaining power in the labour market. The accusers have missed the point. “More than wealth and prestige, philosophy ... provides for man an opportunity to fulfil his life’s purpose which is a more basic need” (Okolo, 1985, 146). Philosophy re-directs the thinking and value of man, by asking and tackling the question of the meaning of life. What is the meaning of human existence? What is the purpose of life and living? It is the way individuals conceive the answers to these challenging questions of human existence that makes for one’s type of living, contentment and valuation. Many turn to religion, some to science. Most forget philosophy –the only rational method for tackling the questions about human existence, the universe and man’s place and role in it.

The real essence of philosophy is metaphysical – the metaphysical urge to penetrate reality - metaphysical questions like, what is the place of man in the universe? What is the origin of things? Why is there something instead of nothing? Is nothing even something? Why am I here? What am I? These are “ontological wonder” which are beyond bread and butter. Man is both material and spiritual; philosophy emphasizes more on the spiritual essence of man.

Another of the charges that is usually brought against philosophy is that a philosopher is “a jack of all trades and master of none”. But as we have discussed earlier, we see that this charge springs from a misconception of what a philosopher’s task is. The philosopher does not claim to know all disciplines in details. What the philosopher claims to know about every discipline is the fundamental principle underlying each discipline. So the philosopher only discusses the philosophical questions in other disciplines and the assumptions and principles on which they are based. The philosopher worries about these fundamentals and assumptions because “the fundamentals of a subject are like premises in a logical argument, the validity and

soundness of an argument depends on the truth-value or authenticity of its premises. And a change in the truth value of a premise will affect the truth nature of the argument itself. Likewise, a change in the fundamentals of a subject entails a change in the subject itself,” (Jackson, 1997: 43).

A common reproach or onslaught against philosophy is that, it is nothing but an arena of disagreements. Philosophy has been accused of failing to present to us a large and growing body of established truth, knowledge and nature of reality. Philosophy has been further accused of being stationary, rather than advancing triumphantly from discovering to discovering, like in the sciences. Philosophers, it has been pointed out, cannot even agree on the most elementary principles of their subject. They are divided into numerous hostile camps. In short, philosophy has been described as nothing but a haphazard jumble of contradicting opinions (Stace, 1937: 314). Now, how do we respond? We point out that philosophy is not alone in the matter of disagreements. In the arena of Art, religion, politics, economics and even science, there are also many disagreements as there are in philosophy. So, philosophy should not be reprimanded because of disagreements. Philosophy is deeply rooted in human life and life itself shows wide cleavages and divergences.

Conclusion

From the above elucidation, we see that the opinions of some people that philosophy is suffering from the crisis of relevance, abstraction and disinterestedness are porous and unsustainable. We affirm that philosophy performs for man and other disciplines a fundamental function. Philosophy, as we have shown has a very healthy influence on the development of society and touches on every intellectual enterprise or discipline that is worth its salt.

We conclude by affirming the position that philosophy is a committed study, a child of wonder and puzzle. Philosophic activity deals with man’s natural, social, moral and psychological problems. Solutions to problems may not be found but dissolution and a sense will be found for them. It is given the important role of philosophy, and the nature of philosophic activity, which involves critical thinking and reflection, the concern for values, goals, and ends of human activity and the

means of achieving these, that philosophy has been declared as the greatest honourable possession of mankind! This is precisely why we cannot escape from philosophy. And in the words of W. T. Stace: “whether we like it or not, we cannot escape philosophy; because on whatever road of knowledge we travel, philosophy lies in wait for us...” (Stace, 1937: 316).

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